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INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE
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RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 0270
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 0158
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 0976
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ MAR LIMA 0613
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO 2954
RUEHQD/AMEMBASSY QUITO 0851
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 0185
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA 0032

C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 000534

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DEPT FOR WHA/CEN AND WHA/CCA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/24/2016

TAGS: PREL PINR ENRG ETRD PM CU

SUBJECT: VP/FORMIN LEWIS FINDS CASTRO "HEALTHY" AND
"PRAGMATIC"

Classified By: Ambassador William A. Eaton - Reasons 1.5(b and d)

¶1. (C) Panamanian First Vice President/Foreign Minister Samuel Lewis Navarro (SLN) told Ambassador on March 23 that he met for the first time with Fidel Castro in Cuba over the March 18-19 weekend. He said Castro appeared to be in good health, as he turned what SLN expected to be a 15-minute "protocol visit" into a 5-plus hour marathon discussion focused on energy issues. After SLN commented on some of the GOP's challenges in coping with growing energy demands and rising fuel prices, Castro replied at length on Cuba's efforts to do likewise. Suggesting that Castro appeared "obsessed" with energy efficiency and alternative technologies, SLN said Castro expects Cuba will save \$1 billion a year on imported oil simply by replacing traditional light bulbs with more efficient fluorescent bulbs.

¶2. (C) SLN added that Castro avoided his usual rhetoric and came across as pragmatic. He said that Castro told him that, forty years ago, he disdained the economic advice of the "Chicago boys," but that the "Moscow boys" who came later were even worse. Castro told SLN that, although he would never say so publicly, he considers himself a "socialistic neoliberal" and counseled the GOP to "stay on track" with the U.S. SLN said Castro basically dismissed Hugo Chavez as too extreme with his criticism of the U.S.

EATON